UNIVERSITY OF ST. MICHAEL'S COLLEGE
31761 04048 4412

MYSTERY PLAY

our of the Nativity of Our Lord.

By Robert Hugh Benson

JOHN M. KELLY LIBRARY

Donated by
The Redemptorists of
the Toronto Province
from the Library Collection of
Holy Redeemer College, Windsor

University of
St. Michael's College, Toronto

HOLY REDEEMER LIBRARY, WINDSOR
TRANSFERRED

UNIVERSITY OF ST. MICHAEL'S COLLEGE TORONTO
LIBRARY

A MYSTERY PLAY

HOLY REDEEMER LIBRARY, WINDSOR
TRANSFERRED

WORKS BY ROBERT HUGH BENSON

CONFESSIONS OF A CONVERT. Crown 8vo, 3*s.* 6*d.* net.

SPIRITUAL LETTERS OF MONSIGNOR ROBERT HUGH BENSON TO ONE OF HIS CONVERTS. With a Preface by A. C. BENSON. With Portrait. Crown 8vo, 2*s.* 6*d.* net.

PARADOXES OF CATHOLICISM. Sermons preached in Rome, Easter 1913. Crown 8vo, 3*s.* 6*d.* net.

THE FRIENDSHIP OF CHRIST. Sermons. Crown 8vo, 3*s.* 6*d.* net.

CHRIST IN THE CHURCH: a Volume of Religious Essays. Crown 8vo, 3*s.* 6*d.* net.

NON-CATHOLIC DENOMINATIONS. Crown 8vo, 3*s.* 6*d.* net. (*The Westminster Library.*)

A MYSTERY PLAY IN HONOUR OF THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD. With Illustrations, Appendices, and Stage Directions. Crown 8vo, 2*s.* 6*d.* net. Text only, 6*d.* net.

THE COST OF A CROWN. The Story of Douay and Durham, 1580–1594. A Sacred Drama in Three Acts. With Illustrations by GABRIEL PIPPET. Crown 8vo, 3*s.* 6*d.* net.

THE UPPER ROOM: a Drama of Christ's Passion. With Illustrations by GABRIEL PIPPET. Crown 8vo, 2*s.* 6*d.* net.
ACTING EDITION. Crown 8vo, paper covers, 6*d.* net.

THE MAID OF ORLEANS: a Play. With 14 Illustrations by GABRIEL PIPPET. Crown 8vo, 3*s.* net.
ACTING EDITION. Paper covers, 6*d.* net.

A CHILD'S RULE OF LIFE. Printed in Red and Black and Illustrated by GABRIEL PIPPET 4to (11¾ ins. × 9 ins.). Paper covers, 1*s.* net; cloth, 2*s.* net.

OLD TESTAMENT RHYMES. Printed in Red and Black and Illustrated by GABRIEL PIPPET. 4to (11¾ ins. × 9 ins.). Paper covers, 1*s.* net; cloth, 2*s.* net.

VEXILLA REGIS. A Book of Devotions and Intercessions on behalf of all our Authorities, our Soldiers and Sailors, our Allies, the Mourners and Destitute, and all affected by the War. Arranged, Translated, and Compiled by the Very Rev. Mgr. BENSON, M.A. 1*s.* 6*d.* net.

LONGMANS, GREEN AND CO.
LONDON, NEW YORK, BOMBAY, CALCUTTA, AND MADRAS

LO! Gentiles in Thy Light shall walk;—
and Kings, all in the splendour bright
Of this Thy rising. Lift Thine eyes and see.

A MYSTERY PLAY

IN HONOUR OF THE

NATIVITY OF OUR LORD

BY

ROBERT HUGH BENSON

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

NEW IMPRESSION

LONGMANS, GREEN AND CO.
39 PATERNOSTER ROW, LONDON
FOURTH AVENUE & 30TH STREET, NEW YORK
BOMBAY, CALCUTTA, AND MADRAS
1915

All rights reserved

UNIVERSITY OF ST. MICHAEL'S COLLEGE TORONTO
LIBRARY

FILIABVS · AMICIS

CONVENTVS · S · MARIAE · CANTABRIGIENSIS · ALVMNIS

QVARVM

ARDOR · PIETAS · REVERENTIA

INGENERAVIT · FOVIT · ILLVMINAVIT

LIBELLVM

VOTA · IMPLORANS

D · D

SCRIPTOR · INDIGNVS

BIBLIOTHECA C. SS. R.
AD.
PATRITIUM.
TORONTO, CAN.
No.

PREFACE

THE following play was produced at Cambridge in December 1907 and January 1908. It was acted six times altogether, to full houses, upon a temporary stage in the school-room of St. Mary's Convent, by the girls of the school, whose ages ran from six to eighteen. The scenery, the properties, and the costumes were constructed—with the exception of two simple Eastern dresses and a few weapons—out of materials lent to the convent or possessed by it. The cost, therefore, was extremely small; the trouble only was great, and this lay almost entirely in the learning of the parts and the rehearsals.

It is alleged sometimes, as one reason for fearing such performances, that the spirit of the age is very different from that in which this method of bringing the Christian mysteries before the eye was almost universally practised. This fear, of course, was not absent from the minds of those responsible for this production, but it proved wholly illusory. The audience, consisting

of Catholics and non-Catholics drawn from all classes, was begged, by a sentence on the printed programme, to refrain from all applause and conversation, and loyally responded to the request. There was practically a dead silence from the first notes of the first carol to the departure of the audience at the end.

It has been thought worth while, therefore, in this age of Pageants, to print and publish the text of a play which has for its object the furthering of devotion to the Nativity of our Blessed Lord, and which has been put to the test of actual performance before a mixed assembly, in the hope that others perhaps may venture upon a task which to its original promoters has appeared at least to justify its inception. Full directions are given in appendices as to the methods by which the staging was accomplished and the properties constructed, as well as, in the text itself, minute stage directions as to the movements of the actors. Realism and passion have been studiously avoided in the training of these; and in their place a kind of slow and deliberate simplicity has been arrived at throughout. There was practically no attempt made to disguise the faces of the actors, except in the matter of a brown stain applied to the faces and hands of a few, and of two or three beards in the cases of old men.

In case, however, that the recommendations given in

the book do not seem sufficient to others, the author will be happy to answer any questions that he can.

The present edition contains illustrations, appendices, and stage directions; a cheaper acting edition shortly to be issued will contain only the words with a few necessary remarks.

The collection from which the carols are taken is one compiled by Dr. Stainer and the Rev. H. R. Bramley, under the title "Christmas Carols, New and Old." It is published with music by Novello. Acknowledgments are made in the proper places.

An admirable orchestral effect may be produced by the use of a piano and an American organ played together.

The play as a whole does not aspire to be considered a literary production; it is only published as a practicable drama.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

MARY.
JOSEPH.
TOBIAS (*Landlord of Inn at Bethlehem*).
DAVID (*his servant*).
ZACHARY, EZRA, BEN-EZRA — *Three Shepherds.*
ELIPHAZ, NADAB, UZZIEL — *Three Merchants.*
MARTHA (*A Child*).
ABEL (*her brother*).
ANGELS (four).
HERALD (*An Angel*).

SCENES

I. *Road outside Bethlehem.*
II. *The Kitchen of the Inn.*
III. *Hills outside Bethlehem.*
IV. *Interior of the Stable.*
V. *The same.*

NOTE.—In the stage directions throughout, "R."=right of actor who faces the audience, and "L."=his left.

PROLOGUE

Before curtain rises there is sung—

GOD rest you merry, gentlemen,*
Let nothing you dismay;
Remember Christ our Saviour
Was born on Christmas Day,
To save us all from Satan's power
When we were gone astray.

Chorus. O! tidings of comfort and joy.

* Bramley and Stainer's "Christmas Carols, New and Old," 1st Series, No. 1.

2. In Bethlehem, in Jewry,
This blessed Babe was born,
And laid within a manger,
Upon this blessed morn.
The which His mother Mary
Did nothing take in scorn.

Chorus. O ! tidings . . .

3. From God our Heavenly Father
A blessed Angel came,
And unto certain Shepherds
Brought tidings of the same :
How that in Bethlehem was born
The Son of God by name.

Chorus. O ! tidings . . .

4. Now to the Lord sing praises
All you within this place,
And with true love and brotherhood
Each other now embrace ;
This holy tide of Christmas
All other doth deface.

Chorus. O ! tidings . . .

Curtains part—Enter HERALD, *closing curtains behind him. He bows low, slowly, with arms across his breast; he recovers himself perfectly upright, and begins in a clear, declaiming voice—*

Good Christians, now the time is near [here]
When long ago our Saviour dear
Came hither from His heavenly hall
To teach and help and save us all.
For born He was, a little Child,
And Mary was His mother mild,
And Joseph guarded both of them
Within the cave of Bethlehem.
Here simple shepherds ran to view
[*He makes a gesture with his right hand.*
The Lord alike of them and you:
Here, on their camels, came to see
[*He repeats gesture with his left hand.*
Their Lord, wise kings of Araby.
Here Angels sang their praises meet,
And bowed before His little feet,
Whose hands the heavens and earth have wrought
[*He extends his hands slowly, palms uppermost.*
And, pierced by nails, our ransom bought.
To this same God the whole world wide
Bows and adores at Christmastide.
[*He bows very slowly as he speaks the line.*

We therefore, too, with good intent,
The simple story here present.
Here sheep and shepherds shall you see,
The Holy Child and sweet Mary,
Great angels and good Joseph too,
Merchants, and simple folks like you,
The sturdy landlord of the inn,
Cold snow without and fire within—
All shall be shown as best we can,
In praise of Jesus, God and man.

[*He bows.*

We therefore pray you of your grace
To hear in silence and good face.
Mock not, if here or there we fail
To set out well this holy tale.
Keep silence, too, except ye sing,
As we shall do, before our King.
And if we please you, well, why then,
We pray you, hold your peace again.
And so God ✠ bless us all. Amen.

[*He signs himself; bows; and exit backwards through curtains.*

Exeunt the three Merchants.

SCENE I

*Road outside Bethlehem. Sky, stars, snow. Up, centre, a little to left, a stump of a tree. As curtain begins to rise, there is sung by invisible Choir. . . .**

WHEN Christ was born of Mary free
In Bethlehem, that faire citie,
Angels sang there, with mirth and glee,
In excelsis gloria!

Chorus (*repeat*). In excelsis . . .

* B. & S., 1st Series, No. 19.

2. Herdsmen beheld those angels bright
To them appearing with great light,
Who said, "God's Son is born to-night,"
In excelsis gloria. [*Chorus.*]

3. The King is come to save mankind,
As in Scripture truths we find,
Therefore this song we have in mind,
In excelsis gloria. [*Chorus.*]

4. Then, dear Lord, for Thy great grace,
Grant us in bliss to see Thy face,
That we may sing to Thy solace
In excelsis gloria. [*Chorus.*]

Then, enter ZACHARY (L.); *walking with a stick, carrying a bundle and a lantern. His shoulders are covered with snow. He walks very slowly. In centre of stage he halts, looks about him slowly.*

ZACH.

Now, God have mercy! I must rest awhile,
For mile on weary mile, and mile on mile,
I've trudged on foot since break of day began,
And, sure, I'm but an old and ancient man.

[*He goes across to stump, and sits on it slowly, disposing his stick and bundle and lantern. He settles himself deliberately, folding his arms.*

Time was, once, long ago, when I would run
And leap and swim as good as any one.
Aye, aye,—to run a race or climb a wall—
Aye, aye,—I'd beat 'em all, I'd beat 'em all.

[*Shakes his head reminiscently. Then passes his hands slowly down his knees.*

But, sure, I'm stiff, and my poor bones are old,
And night is bitter cold—'tis bitter cold . . .
Yes, yes [*begins to look about him*]. I've come a mighty step to-day.
Why, but—

[*Stands up suddenly, stares out* (R.), *under hand.*

Is that the town so far away?
I thought 'twas nearer. But this pesky snow——!
At Rachel's tomb the neighbours bade me go
A mile or two. . . . Yes, yes, they told me so . . .

[*Sits again heavily.*

And now I'm wearied out . . . and not so near
As I had thought . . . (*turns to* L., *stares out.*)
God bless me! who comes here?

[*Enter* (L.) ELIPHAZ, NADAB, and UZZIEL, *together, arm-in-arm; richly dressed; muffled up; carrying bundles, walking with sticks.* NAD. *carries a lantern. They come across briskly as they reach stump.* ZACH. *suddenly stands up, pulling his forelock. They start violently apart.*

ZACH.

Good gentlemen——

ELIPH.

Why, murrain take the man
For frighting of us so! I never can
Abide these rustics.

[*He crosses over* (R.). *Others remain* (L.).

NAD.

They've no sense, I say,
To fright three gentlemen upon their way.
See here, old man! (*Lifts stick threateningly.*)

UZZ.

No, no. Let be! let be!

[*He interposes his arm.*

See here, old man! I'd have a word with thee.
Are you a native here? (ZACH. *nods.*) Why, then, I'll lay

You'll guide us, for, I think, we've lost our way.
A piece of gold or so 'll help you tell——

ZACH.

Why, no, good sir; I need no gold——

ELIPH. (*interrupting*).

Well, well——
We're three good merchants, come, as you can see,
For this enrolling, down from Galilee,
And now we've missed our way.

ZACH.

Yes, yes, good friend,
I'll set you on your way, if you'll but lend
An arm to my old arm to bear me up;
For sure I've never had a bite or sup
Since break of day.

UZZ.

Yes, yes, old man; but tell
Us first our way; and all will then be well.

ZACH. (*pointing* (R.) *very deliberately*).

Why, down the hill straight on, another mile,
Then to your right, and so beyond the stile

[*He makes gestures of pointing.*

To where the vineyards stand—(remember them),
And that'll bring you straight to Bethlehem.
[*He turns, and gathers stick and bundle.*
And now, sir—[*comes forward*]—your good arm.

UZZ. (*avoiding*).

Why, no, no, no,
You've given us all we asked. We could not go
With such a bag of bones! That's not the way
To make a contract. Come, be off, I say!
[*Threatens him as* ZACH. *approaches again.*

ZACH.

Sir, sir; I'm wearied out! I'm done to death!
I'm old and weak of limb, and short of breath.
I pray you— [*Seizes* ELIPHAZ's *arm, who shakes it off.*

ELIPH.

Why, here's impudence as well!
Is't so you speak to men of Israel? [*Threatens.*

ZACH.

Sir . . . for the love of God . . .

UZZ.

Why, that's too good!
"The love of God!"—I've always understood
That God was Justice! Eh! good Nadab, eh?
[*He turns to* NAD.
What do you think? That never was the way
We learned at school! [*Threatens* ZACHARY.
Hands off! old man! I say!
[ELIPH. *crosses* (L.).

ZACH.

Sir, for Messias' sake! . . .

UZZ.

Why, who is He?

ZACH. (*solemnly*).

Sir, it is He told of in prophecy,
Who surely comes one day to set all right,
And judge in love and justice. Why, this night
Maybe, He'll come.

UZZ.

Nay, nay! That's past a joke!
Come, gentlemen; enough of crazy folk!

We must be going on a mile or two
To shelter; and, my friend, good-night to you!

[*Exeunt* (R.) *three Merchants, saluting* ZACHARY *ironically.* ZACHARY *stands looking after them, hands raised. He totters a step or two, then he lets hands sink slowly.*

ZACH.

Now, God have mercy! But I'm wearied sore.

[*Begins to limp back to stump.*

So wearied I have never been before.

[*He sits heavily on ground, leaning against stump. Then, after a pause.*

My limbs that heavy! [*Lifts hands, and lets them drop.*
My old eyes, that dim!

[*Stares about, bewildered.*

Why—if He came—I could not look at Him. . . .

[*His voice grows weaker.*

Dreams, did they say? . . . And old Isaias too? . . .

[*He rolls his eyes.*

David . . . And Balaam . . . and the Fleece of Dew
That Gideon saw. . . . Why, now, how soft the snow . . . [*Sleepy voice; closing eyes.*

I'll sleep . . . a bit . . . a bit . . . before . . . I . . . go.

[*Sinks down. Music begins very softly, and verse of carol is played through as he falls asleep. Then* MARTHA *and* ABEL *begin to sing, off.*

And . . . God . . . have . . . pity on . . . all . . . poor folks . . . here below.

MAR. AND ABEL.*

The Lord at first had Adam made
Out of the dust and clay,
And in his nostrils breathed life. . . .

[*Enter* (L.) MARTHA *and* ABEL, *carrying bundles, with sticks, over shoulders, hand in hand.* MARTHA *carries a lantern.*

E'en as the Scriptures say.
And then in Eden's Paradise
He placed him to dwell
That he within— [*Stop abruptly.*

MAR.

Why, Abel, what's that lying by the tree?

[ABEL *clings to her, lets go, tries to run.*

Nay, nay, be quiet! Here, take hold of me.

[*She is staring at* ZACHARY.

* B. & S., 2nd Series, No. 21.

ABEL.

Oh! Martha, Martha, I'm afraid—

[*Tries to pull her away.*

MAR.

No, no.

[*She goes closer with him; looks.*

'Tis but an old man, sleeping in the snow.
Why—look how white he is! How white and old!
He'll take his death! The night is bitter cold.

[*Advances close to him with lantern.*

Sir, sir! Wake up. . . . Here, Abel, take the light!

[*Hands him lantern. He shrinks away.*

You silly boy! With God nor day nor night
Can harm His children. . . . Here, sir, wake, awake!

[*Shakes him by arm.*

The night is cold. Sir! [*She kneels by him.*

For Messias' sake!

[ZACHARY *moans gently, lifts his head, looks round, sinks back.*

ZACH. (*sleepily*).

Messias! eh? Messias? Why . . . they . . . said . . .
'Twas dreams . . . all dreams. [*She shakes him.*
Why . . . what is this? . . . my head . . .
Is heavy . . . let me sleep . . . [*Rolls over a little.*

Ah! let me sleep . . .
And dream Messias' coming . . . lest . . . He . . . weep . . .
To find no welcome.

MAR. (*rapidly*).

Abel, here— [*He is sobbing.*
Don't cry. . . .
Quick, boy, I tell you . . . lest the old man die.

[*Together they lift him slowly, first up to tree, then on his feet. He clings to them. They move about; finally he sits down on stump, and begins to recover himself.*

ZACH. (*rubbing eyes*).

Why, 'tis but children! And I thought that He
Had sent His angels down to succour me,
And bring me tidings that His Christ was here.
[*Looks round, then drops his head.*
No, dreams! All dreams it is.
[MARTHA *takes him by arm.*

MAR.

Sir! can you hear
Me speak, good father? Can you see me plain?
[*He looks at her; recovers further.*

ZACH.

Why, yes. . . . I heard you singing. Sing again
That which you sang. [*Releases his arm.*
Nay, nay, child, let me go!
I'm well awake enough. 'Twas but the snow
Bewildered me. What was that song so sweet
I heard so plain?

[MARTHA *comes a little forward, smiling shyly*

MAR.

Sir, to beguile our feet
We sang a carol, made—Oh! long ago,
Of times when God walked once with men below
In Eden's garden; whence all woe began
From Satan's tempting and the sin of man.
That was the little song you heard so plain
As we were coming.

ZACH.

Sing the song again.

[MARTHA *and* ABEL *stand side by side* (R.).

MAR. AND ABEL.

The Lord at first had Adam made
Out of the dust and clay,
And in his nostrils breathed life,
E'en as the Scriptures say.

And then in Eden's Paradise
He placed him to dwell,
That he within it should remain
To dress and keep it well.

[*They turn to* ZACH.

ZACH.

Why—

[*Chorus suddenly begins from behind scene. Children are terrified.* ZACH. *stands up, frightened. They cling to him. During the singing they recover themselves a little. They look about, standing all together* (R.) *facing* (L.). ABEL *leaves the others and begins to move across stage, looking in all directions.*

INVISIBLE CHORUS.

Now let good Christians all begin
A holier life to live;
And to rejoice and merry be
For this is Christmas Eve.

4. Now mark the goodness of the Lord
Which He to mankind bore,
His mercy soon He did extend
Lost man for to restore;

And, therefore, to redeem our souls
From death and hell and thrall,
He said His own dear Son should be
The Saviour of us all.

Chorus. Now let . . .

ABEL (*letting go*).

Why! What was that? Who's singing there below? . . .
[*Runs to* MARTHA, *who is looking* (L.).
I'm frightened, Martha. . . . Martha! let us go.
[ZACH. *also staring* (L.).

ZACH.

Why! Who comes here? [*He goes a step.*
An old man and a maid!
Is that their singing? . . . No . . . she seems afraid
And weary. Children! See how slow they wind!
[*Looks intently, under hand.*
Children! look closer. . . . Who comes on behind? . . .
No . . . he is gone again. . . . I thought I saw
Figures who came and went, behind, before,
As if to keep them. . . . Children, do you see?
[*A silence.*

Why! Who comes here? An old man and a maid---- See, how slow they wind!

MAR. (*looking*).

I see a maiden, and a man like thee.
Old, old and heavy. . . . Why, sir, look again!
Why . . . who is that? Nay . . . nay, I saw him plain—
All, all in light— Nay, but he's gone again.

[*The three shrink together backwards across the stage to* (R.) *as* (L.) *enter* JOSEPH *and* MARY, *very slowly. She leans on him. They come up to tree. She sinks on to it, in his arms, and drops her head. He stands behind, holding her. So the tableau remains. Behind the scenes the Chorus sings, as below. During the singing,* ABEL *advances step by step, almost imperceptibly, with* MARTHA *behind and* ZACHARY *last.*

CHORUS.

A Virgin unspotted, the Prophet foretold,*
Should bring forth a Saviour, which now we behold,
To be our Redeemer from death, hell, and sin,
Which Adam's t ansgression had wrapped us in.

Chorus. Aye and therefore be merry; set sorrow aside,
Christ Jesus our Saviour was born on this tide.

* B. & S., 1st Series, No. 3.

2. At Bethlehem city in Jewry it was
That Joseph and Mary together did pass,
All for to be taxed with many one moe;
Great Cæsar commanded the same should be so.

Chorus. Aye and therefore. . . .

3. There were they constrained in a stable to lie,
Where horses and asses they used for to tie,
Their lodging so simple they took it no scorn,
But against the next morning our Saviour was born.

Chorus. Aye and therefore. . . .

[*At this point* ABEL *reaches* MARY, *and kneels down before her on his knees, looking, on her right, and* MARTHA *on her left,* ZACHARY *in centre. During the next verses,* MARY *opens her eyes, sees them, then slowly stretches out her hands on to their heads; each kisses her hand. Then both* MARY'S *hands on* ZACHARY'S *head. He takes them both and kisses them. All this very slowly during following verse.*

INVISIBLE CHORUS.

Then God sent an angel from heaven so high,
To certain poor shepherds in fields where they lie,

And bade them no longer in sorrow to stay,
Because that our Saviour was born on this day.

Chorus. Aye and therefore. . . .

[*Then* MARY *is slowly supported by* JOSEPH *on her right, with her arm round his shoulders, and, on the left, in the same way, by* MARTHA *and* ABEL. ZACHARY *slowly gathers up bundles and sticks and lantern.*

Then presently after the shepherds did spy,
Vast numbers of angels to stand in the sky ;
They joyfully talked, and sweetly did sing,
To God be all glory, our heavenly King.

Chorus. Aye and therefore. . . .

[*They begin to go out* (R.) *in the above order. As they disappear* (R.), *enter* (L.) *two tall angels bearing swords in right hand and burning tapers in left, and two small angels bearing tapers only. These pairs slowly cross stage, and as curtain comes down they are still passing, and simultaneously the last chorus ends.*

To teach us humility all this was done,
And learn we from thence haughty pride for to shun,

A manger His cradle, who came from above,
The great God of mercy, of peace, and of love.

Chorus. Aye and therefore. . . .

CURTAIN.

[*A quiet piece of music begins and continues until Carol.*

The three Merchants rise in alarm –

SCENE II

Before curtain rises, invisible Choir sings—

COME let us all sweet carols sing,*
Omni relicto tædio
Of Mary, Mother of our King,
Christoque Jesu Filio.
When she had borne that Holy Thing.
Reponit in præsepio (*bis*).

* This carol is printed here by the kind permission of Messrs. Novello and Co. (B. & S., 3rd Series, No. 49).

2. Now Gabriel sweeping from the sky,
Missus a Deo nuntius,
These tidings beareth from on high,
Lætissimis pastoribus,
Behold your God on earth doth lie,
Invenietis protinus.

4. Quickly away the shepherds flew,
Clara Gabrielis voce,
Rejoicing as if filled anew,
Bono Bacchico liquore,
Leaping and dancing nigh they drew,
Simul in Bethlehem Judæ.

6. They entered then the hallowed cave,
Jesum hic adoraverunt,
The best of all they had they gave,
Puerumque oraverunt,
Pardon for that was lacking crave,
Subitoque abierunt.

CURTAIN RISES

SCENE—*Kitchen of inn. In centre a fire: pot over it. White walls. Two doors* R. *and* L., R. *into street*, L. *into inn. A table* R. *with three stools. Discovered* TOBIAS, *stirring pot, and* DAVID *busying himself with*

plates at the table. After curtain is up, TOBIAS *leaves spoon in pot, and comes forward. During all this scene he is plainly uneasy and indecisive. He relapses into silence, then rouses himself to speak.*

TOB.

And you have heard it, David? [*They speak softly.*

DAV.

Yes, all day,
Good master, have I heard them.

TOB.

"Them," you say?
Why, who are they?
[*He looks steadily at* DAV., *with folded arms.*

DAV.

I know not, but the sound
Was that of singing in the air, and round
[*He makes gesture.*
About; and steps, and wings; and everywhere
I heard them plainly.

TOB.

Was it from the air
You heard it?

DAV.

Aye, sir.

TOB.

Nothing have you seen?

DAV.

No, sir. [*A silence.*

TOB.

Now, David, what doth all this mean? . . .
I, too, have heard. . . . Say not a word of this
To any man. . . . For these are mysteries.
[*Clamour of voices and stamping.*
[TOB. *leaps back to pot and begins stirring again.* DAV. *turns to plates, &c.*

TOB.

Now, boy, make haste. . . . Hark to the guests below.
[*Shouts.*
Coming, sirs, coming. . . . Yes, boy, take and go.
[*Exit* DAV. (L.) *with plates and bread.*
I'll bring this presently. God bless us! Why
[*Murmur without.*

I never heard such tumult. No, not I
In all my days. [*Knocking heard on door* (R.).
Yes, yes, come in, come in.
[*Enter* (R.) THREE MERCHANTS.

ELIPH.

Well, my good host, and have you room within?

TOB.

What? More of them? Who are you, gentlemen?

ELIPH.

Why, we are merchants three, come back again
To Bethlehem, as all the world doth know,
For our enrolment. Through the frost and snow
We've trudged full many a mile. And have you space
For three good gentlemen? [*He sits down heavily.*

TOB.

Why, all the place
Is full from roof to garret. [*Tumult breaks out again.*
Hark to them!
Why, all mankind seems come to Bethlehem!

NAD.

Well, well! Have you no beds?

TOB.

Not one to spare,
Nor bite nor sup, I think. [*He makes despairing gesture.*

UZZ. (*pointing to pot*).

What have you there?

[*Enter* DAV. (L.).

TOB.

No, no, good sir! First come first served, I say.

To DAV.

Here, lad, make haste. Come! bear the pot away.

[DAV. *takes it and exit* (L.).

ELIPH.

Why, but you cannot turn us out! 'Tis night
And freezing cold. We must have food and light
And roof above us.

NAD.

Let us have the floor
Here in this kitchen, if you have no more.

TOB.

Well, gentlemen, I tell you, as I live,
I have no better and no more to give.

ELIPH.

Well, we must make a shift to rest and dine.
A loaf of bread you have, at least, and wine,
And skins, I'll warrant you, to keep the cold
From killing us. The sheep within the fold
Seemed well-nigh frozen as we passed them by.

TOB.

Well, gentlemen, if you can shift, then I
Will do my best to please you. Sit you down.
[NAD. *and* UZZ. *sit; unloose wrappings.*

Enter DAV. (L.).

Well, are they served there?

DAV.

Yes, sir. [*He stands waiting.*

TOB.

All the town
Is full. I never saw the like before!

To DAV.

Here, lad! make haste! Go, fetch a bottle more,
And bread and meat. These gentlemen must dine.
[*Exit* DAV. (L.).

(*To* THREE.) I promise you, a cup of our good wine
Will set you up, sirs. [*He sets out plates and cups.*

ELIPH.

Ah! I warrant you
We'll do good justice to a cup or two.

[*They range themselves. Enter* DAV. *with bottle, mugs, bread, and meat, and exit again* (L.). *They begin to eat and drink. Landlord stands with arms akimbo by fire, watching. Now and again he comes to table, helps them to wine, &c., and goes back, as conversation continues.*

TOB.

And was all quiet as you came?
[*He looks at them curiously.*

NAD.

Why, yes.
All was as still as death—a wilderness
Of snow and frost.

TOB.

And did you see no man?
[*Very earnestly, leaning on table.*

NAD.

Why, yes, a few. Just as the road began
To come to Rachel's tomb we passed a maid
And old man, and her arm in his was laid;

[*He pauses to eat during this speech. He is very cool and self-contained.*

And they were walking—walking wondrous slow:

[*He makes a little gesture.*

The maid seemed wearied. . . . And an hour ago
Two children; and then afterwards again
Some old fool of a shepherd-man; and then
None further, till we reached the market-square.

TOB.

Ah! yes. A mighty company was there
Of neighbours, come to see the folk arrive
From all the country.

[*He begins to walk about uneasily, pensively. There is a long silence. The three eat. Then he suddenly comes back.*

As I am alive,
I could have sworn that more were there than men

ELIPH.

What, women?

TOB.

Aye, and more. (*He looks darkly.*)

ELIPH.

Well, children, then?

TOB.

Aye, more than human-kind.

[*They stare at him, dropping food.*

Once and again,

[*He looks at them earnestly, making gestures.*

Speaking softly—

As I looked out upon the folks, it seemed
Something was forward—somewhat—or I dreamed!—
Of more than earthly business. For the air
Seemed full of singing, runnings to and fro,
Then silences again—rushes of sound—
Footsteps, it seemed, moved on the frozen ground,
As if some company, to come and go
Was set, all busy, in the market-square.

ELIPH. (*after pause*).

Bah! You were dreaming, man! The air was keen,
And you were weary. . . . There was nothing seen?

[*He seems a little disturbed.*

TOB.

No; for I asked my lad if aught were there
That he could see——

NAD.

Bah! You and your market-square!
A dreamer! Like the old man on the hill
Who babbled of God's Love and Justice till
I was all wearied—and Messias' name,
Who comes one day, he said. Why, but the same
Old tale is past and gone for you and me
Since old Isaias babbled prophecy.
(*Scornfully.*) "A Virgin shall conceive," he said! . . .

CHOIR *softly sings a line or two—*

"*A Virgin unspotted, the Prophet foretold,*
Should bring forth a Saviour whom now we. . . ."

TOB. (*starting*).

What is that sound?
Do you hear nothing?

[*They stare. Clamour breaks out in room* (L.), *and music stops.*

Gone again, and drowned!
But you heard nothing?

[*Enter David* (L.) *running, excited. He stops dead.*

ELIPH. (*after pause*).

Why, the man is mad!
Singing and footsteps! What next? Here, you lad,
Did you hear aught now?

DAV. (*frightened*).

Sir, what did you say?

ELIPH. (*banging table impatiently*).

Did you hear aught just now? From far away
A sound of singing?

DAV.

Why, sir, yes—all day—
And now again!

[*Silence. They eye one another uneasily.*

NAD. (*to* TOB).

Bah! Here, a cup of wine
Will clear your hearing. I dare wager mine
'S as good as yours. Some drunken fellow there
Is noisy in his cups.

[*Holds out cup of wine to* TOB., *who takes it hesitatingly.*

TOB. (*after pause*).

Well, sir, I swear
I never heard nor drunk nor sober sing
As fair as this I heard. (*Drinks.*)

ELIPH. (*easily*).

Why, anything
May maze a man on such a night, when snow
And cold conspire to starve the senses. Go
And see your other guests. Perhaps . . . Maybe
You'll find them singing.

[TOB. *begins to go out* (L.) *slowly.*

Aye, come back to me,

[*Exit* TOB. (L.) *with* DAV. *whispering to him.*

And we three'll join them.
(*To other two.*) Did you ever hear
Such madness?

UZZ.

Bah! Why, all the world is mad
Save such as you and I. As for that lad,
I swear he spoke so just to please the man.

NAD.

But to come back to where we first began—

[*Air of "A Virgin" sung by* CHOIR *with closed lips; it continues very faintly down to where* ELIPH. *opens the door.*

What think you of Messias and that tale
The prophets tell?

ELIPH.

Well, may not prophets fail
As much as any man? I hold such men
No better than this dreamer back again.
Once, as a child, I thought it otherwise,
And deemed that all was holy, and the skies
Crowded with angels, and the earth I trod
All holy as the dwelling-place of God.
And now! Why, I know better. . . . (*Drinks.*)

NAD.

As for me,
I'm with you. (*Drinks.*)

UZZ.

So am I. The Sadducee
Seems wisest of the lot.

[*They pledge one another. Knocking heard* (R.).

Why, who comes here?

[*He pauses. Then he goes to door* (R.) *impatiently, and opens it. A burst of music. Silence. He seems to listen.*

No, no! No room! Nor here, nor anywhere! . . .
[*Listens.*
I tell you, No! There's not a bed to spare. [*Listens.*

NAD.

Who's that? (UZZ. *begins to stare towards door, listening.*)

ELIPH. (*after pause*).

The landlord's out. . . . What's that? . . . Why, then
You'd best find shelter as you may.

[*Closes door; comes back. As he comes to seat, knocking.*

Again!

[*Rises angrily; goes to door, flings open. After pause—*

That's no affair of mine! I tell you, Go.
And find room where you may. Above, below,
The place is packed. Be off! be off, I say!

[*Half-closes door, listening.*

No; not for such as you. The host's away,
Up in Jerusalem. I'm master here;
That's my last word.

[*Bangs door; comes to seat. Knocking. He rises furiously.*

Here's impudence, I swear!

[*Opens door once more.*

I'll set the dogs upon you. . . . I don't care. . . .

[*Pause.*

Yes, to the stable then, with ox and ass.

[*Bangs door; returns growling; sits.*

NAD.

Who were the knaves?

ELIPH.

That old man and the lass
We saw up yonder.

UZZ. (*who has been listening intently*).

Was there no one more?
I could have sworn I heard them at the door—
A multitude of footsteps.

ELIPH. (*hands trembling, head jerking*).

Bah! what stuff!
The two were there. No more! And quite enough.
[*He drinks. The two stare.*

NAD.

What ails you, friend?

ELIPH. (*furiously*).

Ails me! Why——
[*Enter* TOB. *and* DAV. *hurriedly* (L.).

TOB.

Who came then?

I swear I heard the music once again.
And knocking. Was there no one at the door?

[*He hurries across to* R., *but stops irresolute.*

ELIPH.

Music? What foolery is this?

NAD. (*coolly*).

Before

You came just now, two folks were here, but now
Gone otherwhere to seek for shelter.

TOB.

How?

[*He hastens to door* (R.), *followed by* DAV.

Gone otherwhere! Why, there's no room to find
In all the place.

[*Opens door; looks out. Very faint music,* "*A Virgin unspotted . . .;*" *it continues down to end of scene.*

It surely were unkind
To turn a dog away on such a night. (*Turns from door.*)
Where are they gone? Here, David, bring a light.

[DAV. *does so. He looks.*

NAD.

Nay, they are gone. Here, drink a cup with me.

DAV. (*crying out, pointing*).

Oh! master, look!

TOB. (*looking eagerly*).

Eh? eh? What is't you see?

DAV.

There master, there!

[*The* THREE MERCHANTS *rise in alarm and stand* L., *staring* R.

ELIPH.

What is it? Speak, I say.

TOB. (*staring out*).

No. I see nothing!

DAV.

There, across the way!

All, all in light they move, a countless host.

[*He falls on knee.*

ELIPH.

Bah! bah! What foolery! He sees a ghost.

[*Shrinks in fear and anger.*

TOB. (*quietly*).

My lad, I can see nothing. . . . That's the byre
Where lie the cattle.

DAV. (*suddenly crying out and pointing*).

See! all, all afire
With glory!

ELIPH. (*in terror, as are others*).

Here, man! Shut the door!

[*They continue there.*

Well, if you will not, I will.

[*Sidles along wall; shuts door angrily.*

One fool more
Or less in such a household matters not.

NAD. (*recovering*).

Why, landlord! your old wits are clean forgot
And wildered.

UZZ.

Drink a cup of wine with me!
There's no cure for such madness but good company.

[*Slowly* TOB. *comes across to table, still listening.* DAV. *slips out* R. ELIPH. *follows* TOB. *All fill cups,* TOB. *still listening. Music swells up; dies again.* TOB., *after pause, touches his cup with the others. They all drink.*

CURTAIN.

Pastoral symphony begins at once, and continues until the Carol.

Angel.— Gloria in Excelsis Deo.—

SCENE III

Before curtain rises, invisible choir sings.

THE first Nowell the angel did say,*
Was to certain poor shepherds in fields as they lay;
In fields where they lay keeping their sheep,
On a cold winter's night that was so deep.

Chorus. Nowell, Nowell, Nowell, Nowell,
Born is the King of Israel.

* B. & S., 1st Series, No. 6.

2. They looked up and saw a Star
Shining in the East, beyond them far,
And to the earth it gave great light,
And so it continued both day and night.

Chorus. Nowell . . .

3. (4.) This Star drew nigh to the North-West,
O'er Bethlehem it took its rest;
And there it did both stop and stay,
Right over the place where Jesus lay.

Chorus. Nowell . . .

4. (6.) Then let us all with one accord
Sing praises to our heavenly Lord,
That hath made Heaven and earth of nought,
And with His Blood mankind hath bought.

Chorus. Nowell . . .

SCENE—*Hills outside Bethlehem. Lights very low. Starlit sky; rocks on either side; snow on ground, except round fire and shelter.* R. *A shelter of hurdles, open side facing audience, with a stool within it. A fire burning; heaps of skins round it.* EZRA *discovered* L., *looking out under his hand* L.; *so he continues a while. Enter* R., *from behind shelter,* BEN-EZRA *with lamb.*

BEN.

Well, father, do you see him?

EZ. (*slowly, with pauses*).

No, not I! (*Still looking.*)
Nought to be seen but snow and starry sky,
And that great star that hangs above the town.
[*He makes a gesture* L.

BEN.

Here is a lamb, new-born. (*He shows it.*)

EZ. (*without turning*).

Well, lay it down.
[BEN. *goes to shelter.*
An ill night to be born in! Frost and snow,
Cold heaven above, and colder earth below.
I marvel any tender creature should be born
On such a night.

BEN.

I found it all forlorn,
Crying beside its mother.

EZ.

Lay it by

[BEN-EZRA *lays it by fire, wrapped up.*

And warm it.

[*He suddenly takes step or two to* L., *relieved.*

Here comes Uncle Zachary!

[*Enter* ZACH. *slowly, on stick. All through this scene he speaks rather monotonously, as if bewildered.*

Why, uncle, we had given you up for dead!

[*Leads him towards shelter.*

Now, God be praised who brought you safe.

ZACH.

I said

The same an hour ago. (*He comes towards fire.*)

EZ.

Well, what's the tale

At Bethlehem?

ZACH. (*slowly*).

Nay, my old ears do fail;

For, seems to me, the town was full of song

And lights and music as I came along.

BEN.

Singing and music! Why, good uncle, sure
They all rejoice to-night, both rich and poor,
To see old friends again. No doubt they sing.
We, too, have heard it. Is that anything
So strange?

ZACH.

Nay, nay. . . . Well, give to me to eat
And drink a bit. (*He goes on into shelter.*)

EZ.

Here, uncle, take your seat
Beside the fire, and tell us of the way
You've come along. We've heard no news to-day.

[ZACH. *sits down, begins to eat. He talks slowly, with long pauses.* EZRA *sits by* (L.) *edge of shelter, cross-legged. He warms his hands at the fire. While he talks and listens* BEN-EZRA *keeps walking gently up and down* (L.), *now and then pausing to listen or speak.*

ZACH.

First, then, near Rachel's tomb, I saw three men;
And then two children succoured me; and then——

BEN.

Succoured you, uncle? Why, what need was there?

ZACH.

My son, sore need there was; for all the air
Turned black and white about me, when those three
Left me alone and would not succour me
There as I swooned.

EZ.

Swooned, uncle!

ZACH.

Yes, my son,
There in the snow, ere the descent began
To fall to Bethlehem. And there I lay,
All frozen, till the children came my way.

EZ.

And they did succour you? God bless them, then.

ZACH.

God bless all children, as I say. For men

[*Music, "Nowell," soft. It continues for a line or two.*

Are cruel hard. . . . I think that if came He—
Whose coming is most sure by prophecy—
'Tis as a child He'll come.

BEN.

Whom mean you?

ZACH.

Why,
I mean Messias. . . . Hark, is that the sky
That's singing? (*Silent pause; music ends.*)

EZ.

Nay, I hear no sound at all.
What mean you, uncle? . . . Sit you by the wall,
[ZACH. *has finished eating.*
And cover you from cold. For sure the snow
[ZACH. *shifts position.*
'S enough to freeze a body. . . . Well, and so
You came all safe to Bethlehem with those
That succoured you so kindly.

ZACH.

Aye, God knows
They succoured me!

EZ.

And, as you came below,
Was there no more you met?

[ZACH. *turns and looks at him fixedly.*

Why look you so,
Uncle? Why look so strangely?

ZACH.

Ezra.

EZ.

Well?
What was it that you saw?

ZACH. (*shaking head slowly*).

No man could tell
All that I saw.

EZ. (*eagerly*).

Nay, nay, what was it?

ZACH.

Nay,
'Twas but a man and maid upon the way.

[*Music of "Nowell" begins; it continues down to end of* ZACHARY'S *next speech.*

No more than that. But . . . Ezra, . . . such a man
And such a maid as, since my days began,
I never yet have seen.

BEN.

What! fair to see
Were they?

ZACH. (*very slowly, low voice*).

Ben-Ezra, in old prophecy
I read of one, the Mother undefiled. . . .
"A Virgin shall conceive and bear a child. . . .
[*He pauses now and then, as if to remember.*
For unto us," Isaias sang, "a Son
Is given." And then I read King Solomon
Speaks of a maiden, fairest of her race,
Among the vineyards, young, and full of grace. . . .
A fountain sealed and holy. . . . Well, my son,
She whom I saw to-day was such an one. (*Music ends.*)

EZ.

Uncle! you jest!

ZACH.

I jest not.

BEN.

And the man
That went with her?

ZACH.

Son, when I first began
To see the couple coming up the height,
I had no eyes for him; for all the night
[*He makes slow, sweeping gesture.*
Seemed full of glory from her face who came
So wearily.

EZ.

Who were they? What her name?

ZACH. (*softly*).

Her name is Mary; for he told me so.
And his is Joseph.
[*Discovers bundle by fire; he examines it in silence.*
What is this below
The mantle?

BEN.

Nay, 'tis but a lamb.

ZACH.

You say
A lamb? And born to-night? Here far away
Down in the snowy world? [*He strokes its head tenderly.*

BEN.

Why, surely so,
'Twas born but hardly half-an-hour ago!

ZACH.

And is it without blemish—fit to die
[*He speaks impressively.*
At God's own altar?

EZ. (*impatiently*).

Yes, yes, yes, but why
Ask you me that? Nay, tell us of the maid
And man you saw to-day. The lamb is laid
Content enough.

ZACH.

Content without its dam?

BEN.

Why, surely so! . . . Now, uncle, leave the lamb
And tell us what you saw.

ZACH.

I saw but those
I spoke of. Maid and man.

BEN.

But then, who knows
The place they come from, or the place they lie
To-night?

ZACH. (*indignantly*).

Nay, none doth know but God and I,
And all the hosts of heaven, and beasts, maybe,
That give them shelter!

EZ.

Why! what mystery
You make of nothing, uncle!

ZACH. (*still smouldering*).

Aye. Or 'tis
That you make nothing of great mysteries.

BEN.

Why, uncle——

ZACH. (*emphatically*).

Nay, my son, I tell you this:
That when I saw the wondrous maiden fair,
I knelt me down; and lo! she blessed me there!
[*He spreads out his hands.*

EZ.

You, uncle! Blessed by her!

ZACH.

Aye, aye; 'twas so.
I think one day that many here below

Will envy me for that! Her hands she laid
Upon my head, and spoke no words, that maid.

EZ.

Why, this is folly.

ZACH. (*indignantly*).

Aye, God's foolishness,
Wiser than all men's wisdom.

[*His tone changes to despondency.*

Yes, yes, yes!
'Tis nought but foolishness. . . . And so we came
To Bethlehem.

BEN. (*pensively*).

And Mary was her name?

ZACH. (*slowly*).

Aye. Joseph and Mary; Joseph and Mary.

BEN.

Well,
Uncle, and is that all you have to tell?

ZACH.

Aye, that is all—save that all Bethlehem
Seemed full of glory, all to welcome them.

BEN.

Why, were the folks without to meet them?

ZACH. (*excitedly*).

Nay;
The folks were snug within. And yet I say
'Twas full of glory.

EZ. (*makes soothing gesture*).

Uncle, rest awhile;
You're wearied. Well I see that. Mile on mile
You've trudged to-day.

[BEN-EZRA *crosses front to* (R.) *by edge of shelter.*

ZACH.

Aye, lad, and more than space
I've travelled since I looked on Mary's face.

BEN.

Nay, uncle; rest awhile. We'll talk, maybe,
Of lighter things. . . .

ZACH. (*ironically*).

Of wine and company,
And wherewithal we shall be clothed—aye, speak
Of all such matters as the Gentiles seek.

BEN.

Nay, we will talk of sheep, and lambs, and snow;
And such things as God sends us here below.

ZACH.

Aye, then, of Lambs. . . . Such as was born to-night.

[*He strokes bundle.*

EZ.

Why, very well, if't please you.

ZACH.

Such a sight
Might teach the simplest! . . . Have you heard, my son,
How that the ancient prophets speak of one
Who as a lamb is silent, as a sheep
Before his shearers all his peace doth keep?

EZ. (*soothingly*).

Why, uncle, you're all 'mazed to-night, it seems.

ZACH.

Aye, so they told me. Dreams, they told me, dreams!

BEN. (*cheerfully*).

Well, as for sleep, I'm ready. What say you?

[*He stretches and yawns.*

[*At this point Angels begin to come in softly one by one behind; take places. Music also—"Nowell"—begins very softly and continues when Angel speaks.*

EZ.

Uncle, you're weary. Shall we sleep?

ZACH.

Aye, do;
Sleep you, and I'll keep watch. The wolf, maybe,
Will visit us by dawn.—[*Slowly to left.*]—Or if not he,
Perchance another Lamb.

BEN. (*sitting down* (R.)).

Nay, nay, not so;
It is for us to watch.

ZACH.

I tell you no.
Lest when He come, He find me sleeping. Sleep,
Ben-Ezra; 'tis for me the watch to keep.

[*The two settle themselves for sleep.* ZACHARY *remains bolt-upright facing audience, seated. Music continues—a little louder. He starts, then rises softly. Comes out, and sees the angels, and stands aghast. Suddenly lights turned up to the full. Angels all stretch arms up and out.* ZACHARY *falls on his knees. The two others awaken; rush out. Then, to the ordinary plainsong melody of mass—*

ANGEL.

Gloria in Excelsis Deo.

CHORUS (*in simple harmony*).

Et in terra pax, hominibus bonæ voluntatis.

CURTAIN.

[*Immediately after curtain, a piece of music begins and continues till carol.*

Lullay, Thou little tiny-Child,—

SCENE IV

*Before curtain rises, invisible Chorus sings.**

LIKE silver lamps in a distant shrine
The stars are sparkling bright,
The bells of the City of God ring out,
For the Son of Mary was born to-night.
The gloom is past, and the morn at last
Is coming with orient light.

* B. & S., 1st Series, No. 2.

Curtain rises. SCENE—*Interior of stable. Back, centre* (L.), *a manger, with lamp burning in it above.* JOSEPH *and* MARY *kneeling before it motionless. Rest of stage dark.* MARY *kneels rather in foreground. The* CHILD *is just visible. Two angels stand throughout at the head and foot of the manger. If possible, one plays a violin, the other a zither.*

3. Now a new Power has come on the earth,
A match for the armies of hell,
A Child is born who shall conquer the foe,
And all the spirits of wickedness quell.
For Mary's Son is the Mighty One
Whom the prophets of God foretell.

4. (5.) Faith sees no longer the stable floor,
The pavement of sapphire is there;
The clear light of Heaven streams out to the world,
And angels of God are crowding the air.
And Heaven and Earth through the spotless Birth
Are at peace on this night so fair.

[MARY *slightly changes her position.* JOSEPH *lays censer down. Music modulates into Coventry Carol.*

Lullay, Thou little tiny Child,*
By-by, lull-y, lull-lay,
Lullay, Thou little tiny Child,
By-by, lully, lullay.

* B. & S., 3rd Series, No. 61

2. O sisters too, how may we do
For to preserve this day,
This poor youngling for whom we sing
By-by, lully, lullay. . . .

[*Enter softly* MARTHA *and* ABEL, *hand in hand.* ABEL *is holding a toy-horse. They stand motionless, staring. Standing front* (L.). *They look the whole time at the crib.*

3. (4.) Then woe is me, poor Child for Thee
And ever mourn and say
For thy parting, nor say nor sing
By-by, lully, lullay.

MARTHA.

Tread softly— [*They advance a step or two.*

ABEL.

Oh! but, Martha, is that He,
The King you told me of?

MAR.

Hush, wait and see.
I think so. . . . Speak to her.

ABEL.

What shall I say?

MAR.

Why, hail her by her name. I think you may.

ABEL.

What is her name?

MAR.

Oh, Mary is her name.
And that old man is Joseph.

ABEL.

And the same
We saw just now?

MAR.

Hush. . . . Yes. . . . Look on her face. . . .
[*They come a step nearer crib.*
Now speak aloud. . . .

ABEL.

Hail! Mary, full of grace!
The Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou above
All women.—Martha, Martha, may I move
A little nearer?

MAR.

Yes. [*They move a step nearer.*

ABEL.

And blest thy Son
Whose name is—Sister, now I have begun
I know not how to end.

MAR.

Call Him the best
Of all the names you know.

ABEL.

Why all the rest
Are not so good as Jesus; for that is
The word for Saviour. Will that do for His?

MAR.

Yes, call him Jesus.

ABEL.

Blest is this thy Child
Whose name is Jesus. Hail, O Mary mild!

[MARY *turns very slowly, smiling; makes the sign of the Cross, and turns again to adore.*

ABEL.

Oh! Martha, did you see the sign she made?

[*Angels begin to come in and group themselves. They carry the Instruments of the Passion in humeral veils. They form group down stage* (L.).

What did that mean?

MAR.

I know not.

ABEL.

See Him laid

So little, in the manger for His bed.

Oh! Is He truly King of kings? You said

You thought he was!

MAR.

Why, yes, I think so. See

The Angels all about His Majesty.

[*Angels remain motionless, turned towards manger. During the following carol the children go across, step by step, nearer and nearer: they kneel down by* MARY. ABEL *offers his horse.* MARY *takes it, and makes him put it by* CHILD *in Manger.* MARY *leans over manger and puts arms round* CHILD.

ANGELS.

When I view the Mother holding *
In her arms the heavenly boy,
Thousand blissful thoughts unfolding
Melt my heart with sweetest joy.
With her babe the hours beguiling,
Mary's soul in transport lives.
God her Son upon her smiling,
Thousand kisses fondly gives.
As the sun his radiance flinging
Shines upon the bright expanse,
So the Child to Mary clinging
Doth her gentle heart entrance.
See the Virgin Mother bearing

[*Enter* SHEPHERDS, *followed by* DAV. *These fall on their knees*, ZACH. *and* DAV. *together; and remain till end of singing.* ZACH. *is nearest audience, then* DAV., *then* EZRA, *then* BEN-EZRA.

Jesus by her arms embraced,
Dew on softest roses gleaming,
Violet with lily chaste.
Each round other fondly twining,
Pours the shafts of mutual love,

* B. & S., 1st Series, No. 11.

Thick as flowers in meadow shining,
Countless as the stars above.
Oh! may one such arrow glowing,
Sweetest Child which Thou dost dart
Through Thy mother's bosom going,
Blessed Jesus, pierce my heart. . . .

[*Music continues softly until* MARY *rises. If possible, the music should be played on the violin only, which the* ANGEL *holds. The air is that of the preceding Carol.*

ZACH. (*stretching out his arms*).

Did I not tell you so? Oh! see Him lie!
Dimittis nunc in pace, Domine
Me servum tuum.

UZZ. (*pointing*).

See the angels great
About the manger where He lies in state.
Secundum verbum tuum, oculi
Mei viderunt, quod præparasti
Hoc tuum salutare.

BEN. (*pointing*).

See the maid
And mother undefiled, where He is laid,

To worship Him. Ostende hunc fructum
Ventris tui post hoc exsilium !

[JOSEPH *rises. Then* MARY *lifts the* CHILD, *all others fall on their knees ; and all the* ANGELS. *All remain absolutely still. Then, if this Scene is the last, she brings the* CHILD *to the front of the stage. Music stops. She lifts the* CHILD *as high as she can.*

MARY.

Magnificat anima mea Dominum.

[*With the* CHILD *she makes the sign of the Cross over the audience.*

CURTAIN.

Mary~ Magnificat anima mea Dominum~

Adeste Fideles:—

SCENE V

The Epiphany.

Handel's "Largo" is played before curtain rises.

[*If this Scene is acted, in previous Scene* JOSEPH *does not cense the manger; and* MARY *does not come to front with* CHILD. *She only lifts* CHILD, *says the words set down. After which Curtain descends.*

Before Curtain rises the first verse of the following carol is sung.

I.

E three Kings of Orient are; *
Bearing gifts we traverse afar
Field and fountain, moor and mountain,
Following yonder star.

Chorus. O star of wonder, star of night,
Star with royal beauty bright,
Westward leading, still proceeding,
Guide us to Thy perfect light.

[*Curtain rises again on same scene as before. But the Manger is not there. In centre back of stage stands a dais, and upon it a tall chair, bare; two unlighted candles stand upon dais. Discovered,* MARTHA *and* ABEL, *seated upon dais.* ABEL *has book in his hands, reading.* MARTHA *is sewing a child's dress. Lights are high. A silence follows close of carol.*

II. MELCH.

Born a King, on Bethlehem's plain,
Gold I bring to crown Him again,

* B. & S., 3rd Series, No. 45.

King for ever, ceasing never,
Over us all to reign.

Chorus. O star of wonder, &c.

III. Gasp.

Frankincense to offer have I,
Incense owns a Deity nigh.
Prayer and praising, all men raising,
Worship Him, God most High.

Chorus. O star of wonder, &c.

IV. Balth.

Myrrh is mine, its bitter perfume
Breathes a life of gathering gloom ;
Sorrowing, sighing, bleeding, dying,
Sealed in the stone-cold tomb.

Chorus. O star of wonder, &c.

V.

Glorious now behold Him arise,
King and God and sacrifice,
Alleluia, Alleluia ;
Earth to the heavens replies.

Chorus. O star of wonder, &c.

MAR. (*looking up*).

Read it again. (*She listens.*)

ABEL (*reading*).

"Lo! Gentiles in Thy Light
Shall walk; and kings, all in the splendour bright
Of this Thy rising. Lift Thine eyes and see!
Lo! they are gathered; lo! they come to Thee!
Behold, Thy sons and daughters come from far" (*pause*).
And then again . . . "From Madian and Epha,
From Saba too they come . . . a company
Of kings on camels—all shall come to Thee.
And myrrh and gold and incense bring with them
To show God's glory in Jerusalem." [*He looks up.*

MAR. (*meditatively, sewing*).

Why, 'tis most strange—this ancient prophecy!
Surely it stands as plain as plain can be!
And yet no kings or camels!

ABEL (*clasping his knees*).

Martha, dear,
How I should love to see them!

MAR.

Have no fear.
'Twill come to pass, if God hath spoken so. . . .
Where is our Lady? [*She stands up and comes to front* (R.).

ABEL (*putting book down*).

Oh! an hour ago
She went with Jesus in her arms, to see
The sheepfolds. Joseph and old Zachary
Went with her.

MAR. (*walking meditatively*).

Twelve full days have gone and past,
And yet no kings or camels.

ABEL (*clasping his knees*).

Why, how fast
'Tis gone . . . Why, heaven itself is not more sweet—
To look on Jesus!—kiss His hands and feet
And kneel before our Lady!

MAR.

Silly boy!
Why, this *is* heaven! . . . for all is peace and joy
Where Jesus is. Why now— [*Enter* DAV., *running* (R.).

DAV.

They's coming in.

[*Violin begins, off,* "*Adeste Fideles.*"

Quick, Martha, quick—the lights! [*Signs to music.*

Now then, begin.

[*Organ takes up Adeste . . . with violin.* ABEL *springs up at* DAVID'S *entrance; runs to side, gets tapers and lights two candles that stand beside chair. He takes one,* DAV. *takes other.* MAR. *picks up basket of flowers. All three go to entrance* (R.) *and wait, facing audience, looking out. Enter* (R.) *two* ANGELS, *playing violin and zither; then* ANGELS *bearing instruments of the Passion; then* ZACH. *with spear; then two* SHEPHERDS *with spears; then, after slight pause,* MARY, *cloaked, carrying* CHILD; *then* JOSEPH, *and two more* ANGELS *with swords.* MAR. *slips in behind two Shepherds, and walks backwards, strewing flowers,* ABEL *and* DAV. *place themselves on either side of* MARY *with candles and walk with her. The procession takes curve to front and comes up to chair.* MARY *stands at chair, slips off cloak into* JOSEPH'S *hands, and sits.*

Candles placed by her. JOSEPH *stands behind* (R.), ANGELS *group themselves at back.* SHEPHERDS *pass to* (L.) *front.* MAR., ABEL, *and* DAV. *seat themselves on dais;* ZACH. *stands by dais* (L.); JOSEPH *behind chair* (R.).

ZACH.

Well, children, here we are—come back, you see—
Jesus and Joseph both, and Queen Mary,
To home in Bethlehem. . . . How have you sped
Meantime while we were gone?

MAR.

Why, Abel read
A little; and I sewed a little.

ZACH. (*lifting book*).

What is this?

MAR.

Why, we were reading that—the prophecies
Of kings and camels, Uncle, who, they say
Shall come to worship Jesus. . . . Where are they?

ZACH.

Nay, child, but ask our Lady: she knows best.

[*He signs to her.*

MAR.

Show it her, Abel.

[ABEL *jumps up, opens book, steps on dais, and points out passage, first genuflecting.*

ABEL.

Here! and all the rest
That follows . . . here . . . and here . . . here, do you
see? . . . [ZACH. *comes and looks over book.*
Now will you tell us, please, your Majesty?

ZACH.

Nay, let me read it. [*He takes book and comes* (L.) *front.*
"Gentiles in thy light
Shall walk; and kings, all in the splendour bright
Of this thy rising. Lift Thine eyes and see
Lo! they are gathered . . . lo! they come to Thee.
Behold Thy sons and daughters come from far."
[*Looks at* MARY *and back.*
. . . Why, that would mean that following the star
They come from Orient and from Araby . . .
And yet they come not . . . will your Majesty.
[*Breaks off as* MARY *turns and looks out* (R.).
Distant jangled murmur.

. . . Why now, what sound is that? How loud it swells
High on the wind!—Why, sure! 'tis camel-bells.

[MARY *remains passive, smiling. All others look out eagerly* (R.). *Sound comes nearer, footsteps, bells, murmur of voices. Children spring up.* ANGELS *continually look at* CHILD.

DAV. (*excitedly, pointing*).

Oh! look! the camels—see how slow they wind.
Look! look! Here are the kings! and there behind
The servants follow . . . See, they're coming . . . See! . . .
Now they are stopping! Oh! I'm glad that we
Were here to see it! . . . Now they're kneeling down—
The camels, at the door—and all the town
Is out to see them.

ABEL (*pointing*).

Look! they're taking out
The bundles and the gold; and all about
The people crowding. . . . Why! how grand they are!

DAV. (*pointing*).

Oh look! look at that sceptre! . . . Grander far
Than Herod's.

ABEL (*pointing*).

And the crowns! Why, that's the gold
Isaias told us of.

DAV.

Why, look how old
That first one is.

ABEL.

(*A little frightened, taking holding of* MARTHA.)
Oh, Martha, stand by me.
(*To Mary.*) They're coming up the steps, your Majesty.
[*Mary makes gesture to* ZACH. *to go* R. ZACH. *steps* R. *Knocking.*

ZACH.

Yes, sir; and who are you?

GASPAR (*without*).

[*He speaks slowly and gravely.*
We come from far,
Led by the shining of a splendid star.
Our names are Gaspar, Melchior, Balthasár.

ZACH.

Whom do ye seek?

GASP.

We seek a new-born King,
To bring Him gold, and every precious thing
That kings should have.

ZACH.

And is that all?

GASP.

Nay, nay;
We bring Him myrrh; for He shall die one day.

ZACH.

What? He shall die? . . . [*He glances at Mary.*
And is that all?

GASP.

Why, no,
It is not all; for all men here below
Shall die. But God our Lord shall rise from thence,
And therefore do we bring Him frankincense. [*Pause.*

ZACH. (*very slowly and impressively*).

And is that all?

GASP.

Nay. As is meet and right,
We bring our darkness to His Heavenly Light.
Our ignorance to The Wise; our sicknesses
To Him for health; our sins to His Righteousness.
Aye; all our nature, ringed about with Hell
And Heathendom to Him, the King of Israel.

ZACH. (*making gesture of welcome*).

Come in, then, since ye know these mysteries;
For here He dwells, and this His Palace is.

[*He goes across again* (L.) *genuflecting. Children stand back, staring. Enter, slowly,* GASPAR, MELCHIOR, *and* BALTHASAR, *followed by two servants with bundles, &c. The three come down* (R.) *and stand facing towards* MARY; *they bow profoundly.* MARY *bows back.*

GASP. (*courteously*).

That is our Lady?

ZACH.

Yes.

MELCH.

And that her Son,
The King of Kings?

ZACH.

Yes, sir.

MELCH. (*clasping his hands*).

Oh! well begun
Was this our journey.

BALT.

And well ended too.
(*To* MARY.) Hail, Mary, full of grace!
[*He bows to her again.*

MELCH.

The Lord in truth
Is with her! In her arms, in very sooth!
[MARY *holds out* CHILD. ZACH. *makes a sign to them. They bow again profoundly as "Adeste" begins to be played, then, one by one, they go up in order. Each genuflects before dais, then, kneeling on dais, kiss the* CHILD'S

foot and MARY'S *hand; then each retires back to* R. *front and kneels once more. Music ends.* GASPAR *lifts two crowns from* SERVANT'S *tray, and holds them out; then sceptre.*

GASP.

Here be two crowns of gold for Him and Thee;
And here a sceptre all of gems.

MELCH. (*leaning forwand with censer boat*).

For me
I bring sweet frankincense.

BALT. (*leaning forwara with casket*).

And I but myrrh
To offer here. . . . Lord Joseph, give them her.

[JOSEPH *advances, takes crowns, genuflects, places them on dais, then the casket, finally the censer, into which he puts incense; he kneels; all kneel. He censes throne with three double swings. He stands, genuflects, and goes back.* GASPAR *turns to tray, lifts a cope, still kneeling.* MELCHIOR *takes a little silk robe.*

GASP.

Will not my Lady take a gift or two
Of silk and satin, broidered through and through
With jewels?

MELCH.

And a many-coloured dress
Fit for the Little King of Righteousness.

[JOSEPH *steps forward, takes the gifts, and lays them at* MARY'S *feet. Then* ABEL *steps forward with* MARTHA.

ABEL (*to* GASP.).

Will you not speak for us?

MAR.

Some word to tell
To Jesus, for to show we love Him well?
We—and the people here [*Signs to audience.*
Who have no gold
Nor myrrh nor frankincense; yet, young and old
Alike, desire to show that for their parts
They love their Infant King with all their hearts.

ZACH.

Aye, speak, King Gaspar, at this holy tide
For us who have no gold—and all poor folks beside.

[GASPAR *rises, looks at audience, then back to* MARY. *Then suddenly and fervently speaks. His voice rises in tone and force as he speaks, till he ends passionately.*

GASP.

Why, yes; the greatest gift is yet ungiven,
For He, who for our sake came down from Heaven,
Has all already. For His glory fills
The earth: the cattle on a thousand hills,
The birds, the beasts, the fishes; gold and gem,
Ivory of Ophir—all are His; for them
He made, and they are His. [*Stretches arms.*
So we entreat
To offer here before His holy feet
That which alone He asks of us—the love
For whose poor sake He came here from above,
Since we, as best we can, have played our parts,
[*He kneels, stretches hands. All kneel with him.*
Oh! JESUS, MARY, JOSEPH, take our hearts.
To JESUS, MARY, JOSEPH, wondrous three,

All glory, praise, and honour endless be
From men and angels now and through eternity.

[*Music of "Adeste Fideles" instantly begins, ff.; the curtain comes down; then rises again to show* MARY *coped and crowned; then after one chord all begin to sing—all on their knees. At end of first verse* GASPAR *rises, then* MELCHIOR, BALTHASAR, ZACHARY, TWO SHEPHERDS, ABEL, MARTHA, DAVID, SERVANTS, ANGELS—*each one by one comes up, genuflects at daïs, and kisses the* CHILD'S *foot and* MARY'S *hand. Meantime* JOSEPH, *kneeling at side, censes them. At end of last chorus, as last line begins,* MARY *stands, and as she makes Sign of Cross with* CHILD, *all cross themselves.*

CURTAIN.

APPENDICES

I. THE SCENERY

THE stage on which the play was acted was about four feet in height, twenty-four in width, and twenty-four in depth. It was furnished temporarily with footlights consisting of gas-tubing pierced by seven burners shaded with tin head-lights permanently fixed, two side-lights also permanent, and two incandescent burners behind the back-scene.

As substitutes for all these except the last, oil lamps are suggested, hung or standing and guarded with wire; for the last, a strong acetylene light.

The scenery throughout consisted of these things only—a permanent back scene, hung from a roller, constructed of opaque, dark, grey-blue paper pierced irregularly with very small holes; six wings, three on a side; two dark curtains hung on a wire to slide backwards or forwards across the back scene, about a dozen dust-sheets and a quantity of brown paper and cotton-wool. (It must be remembered that the object was not to produce startling stage effects, but rather a soothing and suggestive background.)

These extremely simple accessories were employed as follows:

First Scene.—The curtains were drawn back out of sight altogether behind the backmost wings. The floor was entirely and irregularly covered with dust-sheets, and, to aid the appearance of irregularity, various objects, such as footstools and blocks of wood were placed beneath them. The wings were managed in this manner. Each of them was a light framework of about three feet in width and ten in height. One side of them (that presented to the audience in this scene) was covered with large sheets of brown paper of all shades, deliberately crumpled and bulging, and, here and there stained with paint. Upon the upper side of each irregularity was gummed a flat thick piece of wide wadding, following the curve of the paper, to represent fallen snow. These six wings, placed of course not parallel with the back-scene but slightly towards it, provided three exits on each side, two of which only were used.

Finally, the back-scene, painted with whitewash at its bottom to represent a distant line of snow-covered hills, hung full in view. All lights except the incandescent burners behind were turned extremely low; and the result of this elementary composition was a really astonishing effect of a snowy defile between rocks, seen at night time, with a sky blazing with stars. The light necessary for the seeing of the actors' faces was supplied by the lanterns they carried.

Second Scene.—The curtains were drawn forward so as nearly to meet in the centre, giving a glimpse only of the back-scene which throughout the entire play remained in

its place. The wings were reversed, showing their other sides to the audience. These reverse sides were covered with smooth yellowish paper, painted to represent large blocks of pale stone. The wings, it must be said, had no attachment at the foot, but the heads of them turned in iron forks, like the rowlocks of a boat, reversed and fixed to beams above at the proper intervals. One of the wings, that nearest the back-scene (R.), was painted to represent a tall door with iron scrollwork across it. Lights up.

Third Scene.—This was the same as the first, but the large properties used in this prevented a sense of monotony. Lights down.

Fourth Scene.—This was the same again, with other large properties. Lights half down.

Fifth Scene.—This was the same again with further properties. Lights up.

Finally, overhead throughout were hung ordinary "flies," or long strips of cotton, as broad as the stage and about two feet deep.

II. THE PROPERTIES

Under this head it is proposed to describe chiefly those properties that needed actual construction. For all the articles used throughout, such as the table and stools in the kitchen-scene, it is enough to say that they should be as simple and rough as possible. They should be even rather dirty.

In the *first scene* there is no property used beyond those connected with costumes (to be described later) except the

tree-stump on which the shepherd sits. This is simply a three-legged stool with a dust-sheet draped over it.

In the *second scene*, there is the fire over which the inn-keeper is cooking. A strong black bandbox was taken, and from it were cut out sections, supported by uprights, making it to resemble a road-mender's brazier. On the floor of this stood a cylindrical candle-lantern with a burning candle within; and round this lantern was wrapped red flannel. Between the flannel and the bars of the "brazier" were inserted sticks at irregular intervals. The whole thing was placed on a three-legged stool, and a brown cooking-dish rested on the top.

In the *third scene* this fire figured again, standing on the ground. Most of the stage R. was occupied by the shepherds' shelter, with room, however, left to pass both behind and before it. The shelter was constructed of a three-sided clothes-horse, about six feet high; and this was hung all over and roofed by pieces of old sacking and deerskins. The opening was towards the audience. A hurdle, standing on end, projected above the roof.

The "lamb" was life-size, ingeniously made out of cotton-wool, with a cotton skin on which were painted eyes and mouth. It is wrapped throughout in a piece of sacking, so that no more of it need be finished than the head and front legs.

In the *fourth scene* the chief property is the crib. A box was taken about four feet long, by three by two, and set on one of its long sides upon a table. The whole of the box and table was then covered with crumpled and painted brown paper, resembling that fastened to the wings; straw

was laid inside, and a silver lamp hung from the edge to the upper side. The starry sky at the back was variegated by a large hurdle projecting from behind the crib. The bambino was supplied by a well-known firm in London.[1]

In the *fifth scene*, from which the crib is absent, the principal property is the throne and dais. This needs little comment. The dais came from a schoolroom; and the chair was a very tall armless one of yellowish wood. Two tall mahogany candlesticks stood on either side upon the dais. The book used by the boy was a large leather volume bound by strings.

III. THE COSTUMES

Before treating these in detail, it is necessary to treat first the general principles that were followed.

These were:

1. That the drapery should be voluminous.
2. That the colours should be dark and soft.
3. That the dresses should be shaped after Eastern models.
4. That all such things as tinsel and spangles should be utterly eschewed.

Now the foundations of Eastern dress are the following:

1. The *Tunic*.—This is a long-sleeved garment resem-

[1] The "Instruments of the Passion" are as follows: A spear, a sponge on a reed, a crown of thorns, three nails, a board painted with INRI. These can easily be bought or made, and are carried visibly in white humeral veils.

bling an alb. It may be of any colour, or white. In the case of young men and boys it is drawn through the girdle up to the knees.

2. The *Burnous* or Mantle.—This is more difficult to describe; but it may be constructed by taking a large rectangular piece of stuff, about four feet deep by six feet wide. Imagine this spread out on the ground. Then take the top corners and fold them in about eighteen inches along the top edge, folding in at the same time the whole length of the stuff below. Sew along the top edge only to right and left, thus making supports for the shoulders. Then cut at either side, near the top, in the crease of the stuff, two wide arm-holes. Finally, fix about eighteen inches down the front, on the folded stuff, a strong hook and eye on either side.

The *Burnous*, then, is generally worn simply as a wide and voluminous cloak, fastened by the hook and eye; but in the case of one or two the arms may be put through the holes. It should be made of heavy stuff, and should hang loosely and even clumsily. It may be variegated with effect by long strips of stuff or some other colour attached down the front of the folded wings and straight over the shoulders down the back.

3. The *Girdle*.—This may be of rope in the case of the poor, and of rich stuffs in the case of the rich. When the girdle is wide weapons may be thrust into it.

4. The *Head-dress*.—This is of two kinds:

(1) The turban proper, made of voluminous thin material wound round the head and tucked into the top.

(2) A large thin piece of stuff, made to fit the head by a ring of elastic on the inner side and flowing down behind over the shoulders and back.

5. The *Foot-gear.*—This must consist of sandals, with the addition, in the case of those whose skirts are worn to the knee, of voluminous stuff wrapped round the leg and tied there by cris-cross bindings of string or leather, or the material used by gardeners for tying up plants.

Now, if these principles are followed, the rest is easy. (The "Kings" and the "Angels" need separate treatment.)

1. *Mary.*—She wears a night-dress to her feet. Over this she wears a tunic of dark-blue muslin, also coming to her feet; a white burnous; a long white veil; and sandals. In the fifth scene she is, after the first fall of the curtain, robed in a white cope, and crowned. A sceptre is also put into her hands.

The *crown* was an imperial one, constructed of cardboard covered with crumpled gold paper, with strings of jewels and brooches, over a crumpled cap of dark-blue velvet. The sceptre can be made in the same kind of way.

2. *Joseph.*—He wears a white tunic to his feet, with heavy white or yellowish girdle; a dark-red burnous striped with white; and a white handkerchief over his head and shoulders. He is bearded and browed with grey over a stained face. [See below.]

3. *Tobias.*—He wears a dark-blue tunic with broad brown girdle, brown burnous and turban of "Rhodian" silk. He is girt to just below the knee, and wears hose and sandals. His face is stained and eyebrows darkened.

4. *David*—He wears simply a short-sleeved dark-green tunic and cord girdle; hose and sandals.

5. *Zachary*.—He wears a long yellowish tunic to his feet, a brown burnous striped with white, a brown handkerchief on his head; and sandals. He is bearded and browed with grey over a stained face. [See below.]

6. *Ezra and Ben-Ezra*.—These are in short dark-brown tunics and are wrapped in deer-skins. If skins are not available, burnouses must be substituted. *Ezra* wears a red handkerchief on his head, and *Ben-Ezra* a white turban. They carry spears.

7. *The Three Merchants*.—These are all in long tunic and burnous of various darkish colours. All wear turbans and sandals, and Eliphaz a fur wrap. The stuffs used should be of better quality than the others, each of them wearing at least one piece of silk. Each has a broad girdle, in which is a knife or two. They may carry or wear beads.

Martha.—She wears a white tunic, falling half-way between knee and foot, and dark-blue burnous; hose and sandals.

Abel.—He wears a white tunic and deer-skin, with hose and sandals.

Herald—He is dressed simply in a long girded white tunic and sandals.

The Angels.—These, as a foundation, wear night-dresses, girded. Over this each wears the dress of one of the three Greater Orders. The "priest-angels" wear crossed stoles; the "deacon-angels" dalmatics, and the "sub-deacon angels" tunicles. These garments are all made of

voluminous white butter-muslin. They should wear no wings or spangles or colours of any kind whatsoever. Their hair is combed out at length over their shoulders. Two "priest-angels" carry drawn swords upright.

The Three Kings.—These must be dressed as gorgeously as possible, with any materials available; but the following points may be remembered with advantage. The colours used should be splendid, but not light or gaudy. (If, for example, light-blue is used, it is seen at once to be entirely out of scale with the other figures—heliotrope and purple and dark-red or green are far more effective.) Each should present one predominant colour. Each should wear, in addition to tunic and mantle, a long train pinned to the shoulders, edged with ermine. (Ermine is produced effectively by long strips of cotton wadding dotted with black stuff "tails.") The crowns should be set inside or outside of voluminous turbans of silk. The jewellery worn by them should be heavy and effective and barbaric; for example, a twisted serpent of gold paper turned up the arm, or a heavy collar across the shoulders.

The *Servant* of the Kings should be dressed on the same lines, but without mantle or train.

Gaspar should be bearded and browed with grey; all four persons should be heavily stained on face and hands.

A suitable stain may be obtained from Mr. Peck, chemist, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, such as is used in the "Greek Play" at the University.

The beards used should not be the ordinary beards made in a piece. Hair should be obtained from a theatrical property shop, and affixed piece by piece with strong spirit-

gum. For those who wear beards a few lines upon the face are generally necessary to blend the complexion with the hair.

IV. THE METHOD OF ACTING

It must be remembered that the play does not attempt realism. It is full of deliberate anachronisms. To act, then, in a realistic manner would be to appeal to the eye in one key and to the dramatic perception in another. It was found therefore necessary during the rehearsals to insist again and again upon a certain conventionality in gestures and tones of voices. The actors were encouraged to be slow, to speak extremely clearly, and to make large deliberate gestures rather than spontaneous movements—to beckon, for instance, with the arm rather than the hand. (This method was, of course, that followed in the recent performances of "Everyman.") On these lines it was found that the play occupied slightly over two hours.

Especially necessary was this system in the case of such characters as those of the "Herald," "Mary," "Joseph," and the "Three Kings." The "Herald," standing outside the curtains, holds himself perfectly upright for the most part. When he bows, he bows low with both hands across the breast; when he signs himself with the cross, he slowly "envelops" himself [as M. Huysmans says] in his movement. The appeal of "Mary" also depends entirely (since she does not speak) upon extremely slow, dignified movements. When she swoons she remains motionless, sunk upon herself; when she moves, she does so with extreme deliberation; she looks for a long time at the

character to whom she directs herself, before moving in his regard.

In the same manner, "Joseph" is lost always in a contemplation of "Mary"; his eyes are fixed on her; he keeps the same attitude for long together.

So, too, with the "Three Kings." They carry themselves extremely upright, they make sweeping gestures, they chant rather than speak, they bow and genuflect slowly and profoundly. The "Children" only are allowed to be spontaneous, without being abrupt.

The character of "Zachary" is the most difficult of performance. He has to avoid prosiness on one side and passion on the other; "deliberateness" must be his watchword. I am afraid he is rather a tiresome person; but he is as necessary as the Greek chorus, to whom he corresponds. He appears less tiresome if he is represented by a very tall actor who carries himself bent.

Those responsible, then, for rehearsals, must not be afraid of long silences in which little happens. The play is intended as a series of meditations rather than of dramatic situations and developments. Again and again, if the grouping is arranged upon a wide and semi-heroic scale, the actors will be found to fall into tableaux, which may well be looked at in silence. During the longer of these involuntary tableaux, however, music is sung or played.

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY BALLANTYNE, HANSON & CO. LTD.
EDINBURGH AND LONDON

PR 6003 .E7 M98 1915 SMC
Benson, Robert Hugh,
A mystery play in honour of the nativity of Our Lord
47230691